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AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL PLANNING : ITS ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL PLANNING: ITS ORGANIZATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Agriculture is at present undergoing dynamic changes not only in the developed, but perhaps chiefly in the developing countries. A rapid rise in the standard of living - so highly necessary for most of humanity - depends both on industrial development and on increased agricultural efficiency. The experience of the western countries, however, has shown this process to be fraught with the danger that the traditional foundations of rural society become undermined. So far industrial development has been centered mainly in the larger cities, which by attracting manpower from the countryside has given rise to the well-known phenomenon of rural exodus. The villagers, uprooted from their social, family and traditional environment, tend to become an unsettled element in the town, while the rural areas are depleted of the active human element so vital to their progress and development. A fundamental remedy is urgently required.

Agricultural development plans at a national level frequently engender a discrepancy between the objectives of the national policy-makers and the effective possibilities of the production units, i.e. the farms. This leads to various legislative and administrative measures, overtly aimed at development, but in fact hampering the channelling of the economic efforts towards a clear and well-defined goal. The free interplay of the market can no longer serve as the sole regulator and as a main incentive for economic progress. Accordingly the need has arisen for a method of agricultural and rural planning, within the scope of overall national economic planning, through prior assessment and adjustment of the social, organisational and political changes involved. We are presenting here an outline of some of the experience acquired in this field in Israel.

The nature and scope of comprehensive rural planning

Economic planning, when applied to agriculture, means laying down the principles and framework for government policy, creating conditions in all fields of agricultural production which render the production desired by the state also worth while to the individual farmer. In order to be able to interpret all the factors conducive to the creation of such conditions, the comprehensive planner must deal with a variety of projections and determine suitable ways and means for changing the projected conditions in a certain predetermined direction, in line with basic state policy. This applies not only to the economic sphere, but also, and sometimes principally, to social, organisational and ideological problems. The comprehensive planner must arrive at the determination, analysis and formulation of three sets of systems. The first - macro-planning - the allocation of the means of production among the various agricultural branches so as to arrive at

the most suitable alternative under the prevailing general economic conditions; the second - micro-planning - the distribution of the additional means of production among the different settlements and farmers, so that the average income of the rural breadwinner should not lag behind the projected changes in the national average per capita income; and the third - coordination of relations between town and country, i.e. the appropriate integration of agriculture, industry and services within the rural areas so that the social, economic and cultural balance be maintained between urban and rural development and to prevent the depletion of the rural areas.

These three systems are indistinguishable in reality, and the separation is made solely for the sake of easier analysis and research. This inevitable simplification harbours certain dangers if its artificial nature is not kept constantly in mind. As fully proven by experience in Israel, more serious errors are likely to result from ignoring the overall picture than from any inaccuracies in the analysis of the different factors.

Macro-planning

The agricultural planner, when working on a national scale, has four main goals.

In the first line he must assess the envisaged development of the entire national economy so as to arrive at a harmonious integration of the agricultural sector in such planning. He must know the estimated increase in population, the annual increase of the national product, the increase of the average per capita income, and hence the annual rate of increase per capita consumption. In particular he must know the projected rate of industrial development as compared with that of agriculture.

Secondly, he must assess the factors determining the demand of agricultural products, i.e. the estimated increase in demand on the internal market, foreign market prospects and the estimated prices of agricultural produce.

Thirdly, he must assess the factors determining the supply of agricultural produce. These include a survey of basic natural resources (soil, water, climate), an estimate of the progress of agricultural know-how as reflected in increased yields, and the introduction of new agro-technical methods and prospects of enhanced productivity of labour.

Among these factors we must specially stress the great importance of the human factor, whose decisive role in agriculture is not always recognized. Experience in Israel has proved this factor to override in importance any professional agricultural aspects. Its impact in agricultural processes is more marked than in any other economic sphere because farming is more than just a source of livelihood. It is also a way of life. Agricultural development thus involves the maintenance of a stable community with a way of life of its own, for without such a stable community, adaptable to changing conditions, no economic progress is feasible. Agriculture differs from other spheres in view of the cardinal role played by the farmer's own initiative. This is particularly true of the family farm, which constitutes